

NEWS Release

For Immediate Release

Topic: Back-to-School Immunizations
Contact: Kelly Ann Shannon, 601/576-7667
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Parents can get a head start on their child's back-to-school 'to-do' list by getting required school immunizations before the school year begins.

"Back-to-school time can be an exciting time for our young ones, but can also prove to be a stressful time for parents," said Mississippi State Department of Health Immunization Program Director Joy Sennett. "During August many parents are rushed to get so many different tasks accomplished before school starts."

Sennett continued, "If parents go ahead and get their child's shots now before the rush, they will be able to scratch off another 'must-do' item on their list."

Immunizations safeguard children from illnesses by protecting the child from illnesses and death caused by infectious diseases. To enroll in any public or private kindergarten, elementary, or secondary school in Mississippi, a student must provide the school with a Certificate of Immunization Compliance.

Mississippi's 2001 survey of two-year-old children shows a 88.5 percent protected from vaccine-preventable diseases by 27 months of age. The Department of Health promulgates the list of immunizations required at least annually as directed by state statute 41-23-27 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, as amended.

Sennett said children who are entering school for the first time, such as kindergarteners, need their vaccines, too, if they are not up to date. Vaccines required before entering school are DTaP, polio, MMR, and Hepatitis B. If parents have questions regarding how many doses of each vaccine their child might need, they can call their local county health department for assistance.

Immunizations should begin at birth, with most vaccinations completed by age two. By immunizing on time, parents protect their children from being infected and also help prevent the infection of others at school or at daycare centers.

Children under five are especially susceptible to disease because their immune systems have not built up the necessary defenses to fight infection.

"Vaccines are among the safest and most effective measures for the prevention of disease," said State Health Officer Dr. Ed Thompson.

"Our job as parents is to protect our children from diseases no child should suffer. Our children can't protect themselves from these diseases - they're depending on us."

Health Department staff will offer Hinds County students a chance to get their back-to-school immunizations free of charge at

"A Kid's World" on Saturday, August 18, at the Trademart Center on the Mississippi Fairgrounds in Jackson.

Parents with questions about vaccinations should talk with their health provider, call the National Immunization Hotline toll-free at 1-800-232-2522, or contact their local county health department. Parents seeking the phone number to their local health department can get assistance by calling the Health Department's *Health Info* phone line at 1-800-479-7670.